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ABSTRACT

The original poems and articles contained in this publication were submitted by individuals who have either been through the programs offered by the ReEntry Center at Northern Kentucky University or have otherwise had their lives touched and changed by the center's existence. They are intended to illustrate the growth and achievement that these women were able to accomplish. Twelve poems by Julia Malott appear first: "Toy Box," "(Untitled)," "An Offering," "Sisters," "The Lab," "After Two," "Postures," "Cast," "Armature," "Erosion," "What We Furnish," and "Shining." Three poems by Ardella Bachmann follow: "Who Am I?," "Pain," and "Fly Away, Birdie." Other poems include the following: "A Quilted Life" and "Flight" (Patricia Borne); "(Untitled)" (Middy Eckert); "Statements" and "(Untitled)" (Sheri Eschan); "Searching Is the Key" (Kate Henry); "Tribute to My Teachers" (Joan Johanneman); "Small Town Girl" and "Sisters of the Soul" (Rita Marcum); "Another Graduation" (Deborah Shields); "The Tear" (Barbara Wells); "I Had None" (Deborah Shields); "Life Spiral" (Barbara Washington); "(Untitled)" (Christine Richardson); "This Is My Story of..." (Kimberly Adkins); and "Feeling Lost and More than a Little Afraid" (Linda Helton). Six articles are also included: "What Impact My Experience of Going through the ReEntry Center Had on My Life" (Rhonda Holland); an untitled essay by a 65-year-old widow (Virginia Kraemer); "On My Way Back" (Mary Litzler); "Who Are You?" (Mary Bush); "The Women" (Karen Malott); and "Angie's Story" (Angela Taylor). (YLB)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

It is from our
suffering, pain and longing
that we gain our
strength, perseverance and hope.

—Elaine S. Lewis

Northern Kentucky University
ReEntry Center

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10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

These original contributions have been submitted by individuals who have either been through the programs offered by the ReEntry Center or have otherwise had their lives touched and changed by the existence of the Center.

As you read through these poems and articles, read not only for entertainment and enjoyment, but read for the hidden life stories of suffering, longing and pain that lead to the final growth and peace that each of these wonderful, caring and sharing women were able to find.

These are the stories of lives past, hopes destroyed and dreams unfulfilled--but, more than that, these are the stories of lives improved, faith restored and hope for tomorrow.

Editor

Northern Kentucky University and the ReEntry Center are strongly committed to the concepts of affirmative action and equal opportunity. This publication is funded through the Job Training Partnership Act.

The ReEntry Center's 10-Year Anniversary Celebration booklet was designed and created by Elaine S. Lewis, with contributions from participants and staff.

Julia Malott's poetry is a valuable contribution to this collection of women's writings. We are proud to introduce her as a person who has achieved many personal and professional goals.

Julia entered Northern Kentucky University through the ReEntry Center Program in 1982; at age 20 and as a single parent with a 17 month old daughter, Ashley. Five years later she graduated from the University with a 3.5 grade point average with a major in Philosophy. She attended graduate school at State University of New York at Stony Brook and completed her masters degree. She has completed her course work for her doctoral degree and plans to write her dissertation.

While at NKU, Julia received several awards for her poetry including the Outstanding Freshman Writing Award, the Creative Writing Award and her poetry was also featured in the NKU Alumni Magazine. Julia also placed fourth in a national poetry contest.

Julia is currently writing her first novel and has completed chapter four. She is coauthoring a book about goddesses and the role of women in tribal religions. She is also interested in conducting feminist research in the future.

Julia Malott believes in the warmth, sensitivity, and strength at the heart of all women. She has said that through education and her travels on her own personal journey, she has learned that she is much more than a face that can smile. She has accepted the challenges of many life transitions and her poetry provides a voice for all women who seek to find their sense of self.

TOY BOX

I can't believe your eyes faded
From crystal blue
To a dull grey
Overnight.
I guess with the changing light,
My childish dreams
Were tucked away
Into my toy box
With the threadbare promises
And broken playthings
That collected dust
And lost their stuffing
While my eyes were closed.

Julia Malott - Undated

(UNTITTLED)

When we woke this morning with scratchy,
watery eyes, you told me I was beautiful.
I laughed, amused, then felt your sincerity.
Suddenly my plastic was gold and I cried.
Magic always frightens me.

Julia Malott - 1982

AN OFFERING

The morning joins us early today
and your eyes click on, bright and insistent.
This will be a morning to remember--
we've beaten the birds to the sunrise,
you and I, as we curl together on the porch, rocking.
Wrapped, embracing, we become our own hearth,
warming to steaming mugs and each other,
while a group of cardinals gather
hopping, chirping, singing their praise
to the clear, watercolor morning.

Watching, enchanted, you imagine an Indian rain dance,
complete with paint, feathers and heated chants,
while I rejoice in the celebration before us
as easy and unforced as yourself,
the gift of my flesh to the earth.

Julia Malott - 1983

SISTERS

Those who at birth
found a fertile field in which to play
know nothing of we who were born
throat-deep in sewage
where each breath is roulette
and each word drills echoes
into empty vessels
reserved for love.

She cried all night once,
clutching her dead cat to her breast,
rocking, humming, while blood dried
between her fingers and the long curls of fur
offered no warmth.
She found a page once, scarred by my words,
and grabbed, frightened, for someone not there.
She knew how easily I could leave.

We share the same longing,
trapped as we are under the same glass, scorching.
Our shared vessel in silent screams deafens.

Julia Malott - 1985

THE LAB

She lies pinned, exposed,
the frog at stake,
a neat dissection before him.
Sift, analyze, question--
he works slowly,
guided by concrete presuppositions.
Examination finished,
he cleans his scalpel with careful pride.
Subjective annoyances
are tossed, by a swift hand, over the shoulder.
He makes no wish.

Julia Malott - 1985

AFTER TWO

After two
(it always was)
when he would slide in
walking slantwise
sour breath
propelled forward by
imbalance.
He brought
no flowers.
Just the weight
and
the wait.

Julia Malott - 1987

POSTURES

i.

Your forehead fits neatly into your rounded hands,
your feet spread and firmly set, flatly,
on the floor beneath you.
You do not move but breathe in
quiet gasps, comprehending.
If I shift toward you,
you stiffen and flee and do not move
so I keep my touch though my fingers sing
in hoarse circling cries above you.

ii.

I sit, feet propped, temple to palm, elbow to knee
watching the black space to my right which reddens,
burns, breaks into blue.
White light flames across the sky.
It is morning in the air; it is morning on the ground
where you turn in your sleep, long body, dark eyes
dancing a sleeper's rhythm, as I hurl, jetspeed, away.

Julia Malott - 1987

CAST

The clay stains the hands
dries and cracks on skin
sends brown streams down the fingers
when well water pours over arms.
The whole body cakes and covers
ready to be case:
Land Sculpture: Woman in Mold
mind in mildew
watching from genderprison
for the fist that swings
to crack the plaster face
designed to be unflinching
pigment washed away
or perhaps inside
where the clay still cries
mountain red
like a chicken held by the head
steady river alizarin

Julia Malott - 1987

ARMATURE

You caught me sleeping once,
a quick sketch,
Woman Draped in Blue.
On your wall I strained a canvas.
In a small wooden box the planets and I revolved.

Through your hands I was
the clay woman always reaching.
In charcoal she was reaching
and in oil
and in pen.
If I shifted, she shifted too.
Finally she touched the center.
You took a photograph and broke her down.

"I'm sculpting," you said,
and your eyes burned
as fingers pressed along my throat,
across my breast.
You did not say what would spring
from the silent curves of your hands
unmolding me, what mute creatures
lay dormant beneath your touch.

Julia Malott - 1987

EROSION

Five days raining and
the sky's hunger matches my own.
If you moved beside me,
if I woke to your legs wrapped in mine
the thunder would stop,
the night could bear no sound.
Only your absence moves against me.
My hands remember the slow curve
down your back.
It could rain forever and wash me away.

Julia Malott - 1990

WHAT WE FURNISH

In my dream
entire rooms could fit inside me
and you placed it all there, laughing.
Why then when we wake
do you still wonder what I can hold,
do you touch me, eyes widening,
waiting to hit the place where I say stop?
It is not of my tongue, not of my teeth.
My mouth cannot form it.
Run to me with your cupped hands
and, just once, before you fall,
let them be full
for me.

Julia Malott - 1990

SHINING

I sleep on marked pillows,
dream of gathering stones to place in your hands.
And your hands can hold so many stones, so many.
My body wakes singing strange arias--
trace notes left by your touch.
I want to smooth myself,
polish to a high gloss all I know
against you.

Julia Malott - 1990

WHO AM I?

Sometimes I look at myself in the mirror and the face is one of a stranger. The lines of life are engraved in the skin like thumbprints and they're mine, all mine, unlike anyone else. I ask this stranger, "who are you?" and there is no answer.

There can be no answer because yesterday I was someone else and tomorrow will be a new me. But today I must deal with this stranger in my body, breathing my air and looking back at me with eyes lacking recognition.

Please help me, I cry, help me to know myself and to say in the mirror, "I know you -- you're me!"

There is silence.

Ardella Bachmann
Former Advisory Board Member and ReEntry Center Typing Instructor

PAIN

It is so painful to say goodbye
To one I love so much;
To one that ignites a raging fire
With just a simple touch.

It is so painful to walk away
With not a backward glance,
And tuck away the memory
Of the pleasure of his glance.

It is so painful to cry at night
With no one to dry my tears,
Nor hold me close, so tenderly close,
And kiss away my fears.

It is so painful to know
That someone else now shares his life,
This thought alone can sheathe the soul
Like the blade of a murderer's knife.

But pain is real and can't be denied
When a lover has chosen to leave.
I only hope I can stand tall
And never cease to believe
That somewhere in this cold, cruel world
A soul wanders aimlessly free
Staring into the faces he meets--
My perfect mate looking for me.

Ardella Bachmann
Former Advisory Board Member and ReEntry Center Typing Instructor

FLY AWAY, BIRDIE

It's lonely here tonight.
The radio is low, the night is young,
But something isn't right.
There is no laughter, no ringing phones.
It's lonely here tonight.

When you were small there were no fears
Of ever growing old.
A young child helps to keep one's youth;
A hug rates more than gold.

But time is cruel and doesn't wait,
And soon the child is grown.
Dust covers the blanket that once was held
By hands so very small.

The sandbox is gone, the swing is still,
And the trike has lost a wheel.
your face now has the grown-up mask
To cover how you feel.
Beer has replaced the Kool-Aid craze
And girls have replaced T.V.
Plans are made and notes are left
By a son I seldom see.

I'm trying hard to let you go,
The feathered bird takes flight,
But through it all my eyes are moist.
It's lonely here tonight.

Ardella Bachmann
Former Advisory Board Member and ReEntry Center Typing Instructor

A QUILTED LIFE

Warmth and color and design--
Quilts offer all of these.
Most importantly, quilts ward off
the insecurity, the insanity, the isolation of a mountain woman's life.

It is what you do between meals and after cleaning off coal dust and while staring out the window opening.
It is your private reality where you speak what others cannot or dare not hear.

The many colored patterns, designed by women, sewn for men and children,
tell a tale without pen or paper.
Oft recording her story in rich and frightening hues.

Secrets and stitches woven from your swatches--
Reliving and remembering the terrors of the lone nights,
the glories of the child's first school dress,
the sadness of the infant's funeral cloth.

Spread open your quilts my womenfriends as you have spread your limbs.
Lay bare your joys and pains for these last longer than the children you've lost.
Look at what beauty you have patched from your scraps, from your rags.
Glorious talents lie within this fertile soil, some spoken, many secret.

Patricia C. Borne, Instructor - ReEntry Center 1990

FLIGHT

You possess the strength of butterfly wings.
Each day you war against the strong North Wind--
the realities of your new lives.
you will survive
as you learn the options of life.

Ah, what courage you have
you men and women taking part
in your most important transition.
You are the change masters
you are the controllers of your destinies.

What a joy to realize choice!
To make choices.
you are delicate and strong
like the butterfly's shelter.

As instructors sometimes we see
the awakening, the birth, the sunlight
taste your faces
for the first time.

We are the observers!

We bask in the shadow of your first flight.
Leave the cocoon with us.
We will wrap your sorrows in it

and discard these trappings, these binds
that restrict your freedoms.

We will make room for the formation of the next
butterfly.

Patricia C. Borne, Instructor - ReEntry Center 1990

(UNTITTLED)

I thought and thought about dialing the phone
I needed a change, not just home alone
Something to show me that dreams can still live.
My children grown, my husband busy
now was my time to take what Angie was giving.
Thanks.

Middy Eckert

STATEMENTS

Smile:

I know you're watching me

Cold hands, shaky knees.

Speak:

And the words won't come.

Listen:

Do you hear the words I'm saying.

I watched, I learned and then I became,

(while we played this speaking game)

the speaker that you

wanted me to be.

Smile:

I made it through.

Speak:

I want to thank you!

Listen:

Do you know how grateful I am?

Sheri Eschan

*This poem is dedicated to Pat Borne, who has been a terrific teacher--although I haven't always been the best student. Thanks for your patience and understanding.

(UNTITLED)

Motivation!
Frustrations!
Have we reached the end
Or is this the beginning
Searching
I came to you
looking for some attainable goal.

You gave me hope
You gave me strength
And now I know
I'll make it on my own
One more day--
And I'll be on my way
Into another world--
When I came here
I was a child
And now I'm leaving
a woman.

Thank you.

Sheri Eschan (1990)

SEARCHING IS THE KEY

Where I was then I am no more
I searched and found an open door

Afraid and alone, anger made me strong
I reached out and you led me along

Each step became a challenge to face
But each success became another victory to taste

Buried inside my garbage and my gifts
the lonely, the fears and the secrets I wished

I was given the courage to try,
the wisdom to make right choices,
and not wings to fly

I was not saved or rescued in the night
but encouraged and empowered
causing fear to take flight

Believing in me
is the trophy I've won
Searching is the key
available to everyone

Kate Henry - 1990

TRIBUTE TO MY TEACHERS

You touched me within,
the dark secrets kept in my heart . . .
the hurts, the fears, the terror

You led me back from nowhere
where emotions drained by constant stress were mute

You taught me to pull myself up and strive
for knowledge, happiness, joy, peace . . .

You made me see the good hidden in myself,
in others, in you

Lessons learned for a lifetime--my teachers

Joan Johanneman, Secretary - ReEntry Center 1990
Former General Clerical Participant - 1989

SMALL TOWN GIRL

Small Town Girl
Big Time Dreams
She wanted so
many things.
The thing she
wanted most
remained a faint ghost
never helping her
see which way to go.
She tried so many things
looking for something
or someone to make her happy
only to find
happiness comes
from within.
How can you
be happy when
you're not sure how
happiness comes and goes
never staying more than a day or two.
Then it's gone again
only to leave a
cold empty shell
where once there was
a warm happy feeling.

Rita Marcum (1990)

SISTERS OF THE SOUL

We are sisters of the soul
You and I
Sometimes we laugh
Sometimes we cry
We try and try
We don't know why
We are born and bred--
To never say die
A strong spirit must always try.
So you be my strength
And I'll be yours
When we bond together
There's no bridge we cannot torch

Rita Marcum (1990)

ANOTHER GRADUATION

As I watch each smiling face . . .
Walk down the aisle to take her place. . .
I wonder in my mind's eye. . .
How do I know each one to go by? . . .
I know I've seen their faces before. . .
Maybe at the grocery store?. . .
Or maybe walking down the street . . .
I said "hello" for to greet? . . .
As each one accepts their certificate. . .
I know for sure each one I've met. . .
Then at long last it occurs! . . .
And the knowledge within me warmly stirs . . .
I know at last what I had failed to see. . .
Why they are just a reflection of me! . . .

Deborah Shields

THE TEAR

You know, I shed a tear today,
my head was bent, it ran down my cheek;
I watched it fall in slow motion
catching the sunlight like a shimmering prism--
A droplet of rainbow.

But this tear was different from the other
myriads that had fallen before.
Just a small, salty bit of me.
How did it come to be so different then?

Its origins were not of sadness and hurt,
that little drop was understanding.
Coming to know new friends, caring and kind,
coming to know new hopes, bright and clear,
And from a wild daisy with a crayon-colored card attached
reading, "Mom, I love you."

Barbara Wells

I HAD NONE

You gave me back my self respect . . . when I had none . . .
Self confidence is mine now . . . before I had none . . .
Belief in myself is real. . . before you I had none. . .
Dreams can be realized. . . before you I had none . . .
Thank you for all you've done . . . when before I had none. . .

Deborah Shields

LIFE SPIRAL

Becoming aware that someone could help me,
My heart caught a glimmer of hope.

Becoming aware that "life is not fair,"
I surrendered that expectation.

Becoming aware of the right to say "no,"
I experienced relief.

Becoming aware of responsibility for my own life,
I accepted that responsibility.

Becoming aware of the right to be taken seriously,
I started to feel my own power.

Becoming aware that men are people too,
I pondered that notion, and nurtured a new compassion.

Becoming aware that mothers, though they try, sometime fail,
I began to heal my daughterly wounds;

Becoming aware that I would survive,
I felt confident about my future;

Dusting off my dreams, I felt joy!

Barbara Washington (Reed)

(UNTITLED)

Phrases of affirmation stirring in my mind -
not finding a welcome reception
They are words at one turn -
truth at another -
lies embedded in my soul -

Yet, my spirit begins to awaken so slowly, so carefully--it cowers
as it moves - like a wounded child

Oh, to break through to the truth to awaken the soul -
to heal all that has come before -

The spirit begins to breathe in life and truth -
a different truth - a truth of a foreign tongue
I do not understand - the words intrigue me
I grow thirsty for knowledge and understanding

My spirit becomes restless and agitated
Help me find the understanding
Share with me the truth

. . . and you did.

Christine Richardson, Scholarship Program Coordinator
ReEntry Center - 1990

This is my story of...

A woman who sits around the house all day,

has nothing to do but think of bills to pay.

Now I don't mean that literally because we women know,

there's always a thousand things to do, always somewhere to go.

But there is something that is missing deep inside of your soul,

when you're not working and striving to meet some kind of goal.

My husband and I were frustrated - trying to make all the ends meet,

when I announced, "I AM GETTING A JOB, WE'RE GETTING BACK ON OUR FEET!"

The ad that I called about wasn't for a job at all...

It was for classes at Northern starting up in the fall!

I didn't hesitate a moment for something that I've always wanted to do,

was to have <u>something</u> just for me and get educated too.

The class at the Re-Entry Center consisted of calculator, computer and the bookkeeping course,

I found myself so hungry for this knowledge and strove with such force.

The girls that I met, we became friends quite easily,

for we were all there for the same purpose, not for anything measly.

We struggled together to learn all that we could,

and we worked so hard at it we knew that we would.

We must thank God for the teachers whose knowledge without,

we'd be lost in that one world back there I want to forget about.

But I can't forget the pain and the loneliness I felt within,

So I tell all I can of the Re-Entry Center and some I'll tell again.

You've touched my life so deeply and now I'm on my way,

To a New Beginning, A New Career - I'm Blessed, what more can I say?

Thank You Mary Bush and Mary Ann Quitter so Very Much!

Kimberly Ann Adkins - 1990

Feeling lost and more than a little afraid
Making a step to change one's life

Joining with persons who care
And who have been there, too

Help prepare the way for a better future.

Yes, this sums it all up. My life seemed to be at its lowest when a friend told me about the ReEntry Center. I had been a secretary in the past, so I brushed up on my typing and was enrolled in a word processing class. Never did I feel like a person alone. So many women shared the same feelings I did. Some of these women were my instructors and counselors.

I learned much in those three months. As it turned out, I graduated on a Friday and began my job the very next Monday. I have been working ever since.

Many thanks to the people at the ReEntry Center. Now my future is secure.

Linda Helton - 1984-85 Word Processing Class

"WHAT IMPACT MY EXPERIENCE OF GOING THROUGH THE REENTRY CENTER HAD ON MY LIFE."

My experience of going through the ReEntry Center had a tremendous impact on my life. As a high school drop out who had obtained my GED, I seemed to always find myself in low-paying, unsatisfying, dead-end jobs without a future. This went on for about four or five years after leaving high school--only for me to find myself in an unsatisfying dead-end marriage with little hope of a future.

Looking back on it now, I wonder if I was actually in love, or just intrigued by the thought of being in love and being taken care of. My ex-husband didn't want a liberated wife, "a wife that worked," and being brought up with old fashioned ideas and morals, plus the fact that I was afraid to stand on my own two feet . . .this suited me just fine. . .for a while. After about three years of continual financial and domestic problems, I realized things were not going as I had planned. I felt very disillusioned by what I'll term as the Cinderella syndrome. Only my knight in shinning armor that was supposed to marry and take care of me so we could live happily ever after had turned out to be a frog. My fairy tale romance had turned nightmare. I felt like leaving many times, but fear kept me in the relationship; fear of being on my own, fear of the unknown, fear of facing the world alone, fear of not being able to take care of my baby daughter by myself, to sum it up totally . . . fear of failing. After all, I had nothing to offer the world, little education,

limited job experience, no self-esteem--"Nothing," I was a "Nobody." Whenever I'd mention leaving, my husband would reinforce my doubts in myself with statements like "Are you crazy? What will you do . . .move in with your parents for life, live on welfare? How are you going to take care of our daughter? Get a job, that's good . . .and just what kind of job do you think you can get? You're being Stupid!!!" His words cut to the core, but through the hurt and tears, and with dignity, I informed him I could, and would do better! I'm not sure I believed this myself at the time, but I knew I had to try. I had to get out, so I came back to Kentucky and filed for divorce. My family and friends encouraged me to job hunt, but I wonder if they even really believed in me--it's hard to believe in someone who doesn't believe in herself.

Several weeks I job hunted, it was very discouraging. I remember one job counselor at the unemployment office saying to me on one occasion, "I'm sorry, but with your limited experience you can't expect much; after all, there are a lot more qualified people than yourself out of work!" It seemed like everywhere I turned I found discouragement. But I didn't give up, I kept going back to the unemployment office . . . which is where I eventually found out about the Northern Kentucky University ReEntry Center. I was very intrigued, yet very frightened that it was beyond my capabilities. I was wrong. The director, coordinators, and instructors at the ReEntry Center changed my life. They encouraged me, they challenged me, they supported me, they believed in me and taught me to believe in myself. They

helped me appreciate education and see learning as a stimulating and growing experience. The Career Development/Refresher Education course gave me the knowledge and employability skills to face a challenging job market with confidence. The Typing and Word Processing courses gave me the skills I needed to succeed in the job world. After completion of these courses, I got a job as an assistant property manager at a large apartment complex which lasted three years. Next, I went to work for the United States Postal Service, but due to a layoff I found myself unemployed again. Again, I reviewed the material from my courses at the ReEntry Center on interviewing and making a favorable impression on employers, and I landed my present job.

I am now a Patient Services Coordinator at a large primary care facility with three locations. In my present job role, I supervise the support staff at all our locations, plus I assist in the organization and operation of all our facilities. I'm making more money than I ever have in my life, and feel I've succeeded in what is seen as a typically male-oriented job force. I'm a member of an executive team with responsibilities such as screening applications, interviewing, supervising and coordinating staff schedules, training, counseling, and evaluating staff performance. I review, evaluate and initiate new policies for the department I oversee. My contributions have played a major role in our operation and organization of our facility. I've performed every job within my department--such as intake registration, medical and dental reception, medical coding and insurance billing, and medical records.

Within the last year and a half, I have received three raises, a promotion, and several excellent evaluations. I've maintained a residence for my daughter and myself for the last five years without ever being late on a payment and have reestablished excellent credit.

In addition to all this, I have also completed three management courses. I'm a new person. It wasn't easy, but I've proved to myself I CAN do it!! But I could not have done it without the help and support of the ReEntry Center, they had faith in me when I had none my myself. Which brings me to the most valuable lesson I learned at the ReEntry Center. . . That I, Rhonda Holland, alias Nobody, am actually "SOMEBODY"! For that I can never thank them enough.

Rhonda Holland - 1985-86 Word Processing class

About six years ago, at the age of 60, my husband died. I was so lonesome and needed some kind of income so I would not have to live like a pauper. My sister-in-law saw your ad in the Enquirer and suggested we go up to the college and see what it was all about. I signed up but she didn't. That was the best thing I ever did in my life. It has been over five years since I completed my courses at the ReEntry Center. I owe everything that has happened to me since to the great teachers that took the time to encourage us and lead us in the right direction.

After completing the eight weeks at the ReEntry Center, and after not having worked in an office in 35 years, I worked six months as a receptionist in the office of the Dean of the College of Business to get me used to the new office techniques. They also encouraged me to get my GED--which I did in one day. They then put me in the computer classes. After completing them they helped me get a job at the Environmental Protection Agency in Cincinnati. I an now starting my fifth year there. I love my job, and look forward to going to work every day. I have been blessed by only missing two sick days in the four years I have been here.

I am now 65 years old and in February I started to redo my basement. I am building walls, hanging doors, installing tiles. All by myself. I did have to have a plummer to install the plumbing for the new bathroom. But I am enjoying doing this. And as long as you feel good with what you are doing, why not do it.

I plan to work as long as they let me and as long as I can. Don't let age stop you. Just keep healthy. I am sure someone upstairs has been looking out for me. Good luck to all of you.

Virginia Kraemer - 1985-86 Word Processing class

ON MY WAY BACK

When I entered the ReEntry Center it was on the advice of a counselor at the Women's Crisis Center. I entered this course with no self confidence and very, very low self-esteem. I couldn't type, and my math was terrible. I had absolutely no switchboard skills and oral communications scared me to death! I was not "secretary material--who me, a secretary, you've got to be kidding." I also had a bad (negative) attitude. With the help of the ReEntry Center, I am a more independent and dependable person. But more important than getting a job, the ReEntry Center showed me I am a worthwhile person; not only do I know I am worth something, I can now feel it too--and it feels wonderful.

Before I entered the ReEntry Center I really didn't think I could get out of the mess I was in. I was busy taking care of a husband who thought he owned me; and two kids I could not get to mind. I was going through such a hard time that they rarely got any attention, so they were rebelling in their own way. When I hit rock bottom I went to the Women's Crisis Center. They sent me to Northern Kentucky University's ReEntry Center where I also felt I didn't belong. Like I said, I was far from being secretarial material.

The ReEntry Center gave me all the encouragement I could handle, plus! At one point, I wanted to quit, but I knew if I quit it would hurt nobody but me, so I stuck it out and it really paid off. I am working at a decent job at decent pay. With the help of the ReEntry Center I have succeeded in changing my life around. Now I am happy and making my own decisions on a lot of everyday matters.

I think one of my favorite phrases I got from the ReEntry Center Speaker's Program was, "fake it until you make it." You can fake it until you get a job and then you can learn that job while you are working.

So how did the ReEntry Center help me? It helped me see things in a more positive light. It also showed me I do have choices in my life. I do have a choice to live my own life or have someone else run it.

I chose to live life the way it makes me happiest!

Thank you ReEntry Staff.

Mary Litzler

WHO ARE YOU?

Thirteen pair of eyes stared with curiosity as I entered the room. I sensed the unspoken questions, "Will she relate to us? Will we relate to her? Who are you?" Hoping to relieve the tension in the room, I smiled and said "Hello, I'm Mary Bush, your instructor." And now it was my turn as I called out names and looked into each face to inwardly ask "Who are you?"

This scenario is played out the first night of each new class; so, after a brief orientation regarding the curriculum and paper work involved, we took turns telling a little about ourselves. Of course, we all put our best self-portrait forward and really learned very little about each other.

At this point, I recalled a book I had read several years before by John Powell which contained a scene where a child is asked "Who Are You?"--and she replied, "I'm afraid to tell you, because if I tell you who I really am, you may not like me, and I'm all I have." "Not true here," I said. True, you are here to learn a skill, but without confidence and self-esteem the skill will be meaningless. You will find you all share some or most of the same fears, hopes and hurts--and discussing them openly will strengthen your hopes and lessen your fears.

I saw traces of doubt in their eyes; yet, I knew twelve weeks from tonight the fears and doubts will have disappeared into the shadows as they enter the job market with confidence in themselves and pride in the skills they have learned. They will really know the answer to "Who Am I?"; and, yes, also to the question "Who are you, Mary?" Each class teaches me as much as I teach them about caring and sharing the song of life.

Mary Bush, Instructor - ReEntry Center 1990

THE WOMEN

In my finest fantasy hours, I am a writer--a purveyor of women's stories. Narrations of courage and struggle, invincible heroines, flow from my pen. Page after page fills with heartfelt tales of women knocked down only to rise again, and again.

The protagonists are old and young and in the middle of life. They know fear and failure; they know perseverance and change. Their lives are alternately rich and arid--they struggle simply to survive. Courage becomes the armor, the shield that moves them from victim to heroine. Spirit is the sword that vanquishes the barriers to forward movement. They will not be felled--they rise slowly, together, sister helping sister.

Crone, mother, single sister--all moving toward the future. They tend families, nurture friendships and invest wholly in the challenge of meeting career goals. Their faces reflect the joy and pain of lives filled with ambiguity and change. Their voices create a rich symphony born of myriad emotions and experiences. These are strong women whose strengths come from their weaknesses and from the pain of their lives.

While it is only in illusion that I am a writer, the women of the stories are real. The ten years I have spent at the ReEntry Center have made me privy to the beauty and sadness of many women's lives. Experiences have been shared emotionally, intellectually and mutually. Losses and gains have been joint ventures. We are all richer for the common experience.

Friends, too, are women of the stories. Together we struggle to understand life's meaning. We celebrate our joys and victories and seek to know our spiritual place in the universe. We comfort, applaud and affirm as the occasion requires. We grow older and wiser; we grow a little softer--and a little tougher. Illusions fade, expectations change and we find that integrity is the mother of peace. Crone, mother, single sister--all moving toward the future.

Karen Malott
Director of the ReEntry Center - 1990

ANGIE'S STORY

As a veteran member of the staff I am writing this letter to be included with the reflections from past participants and others on the staff who feel a great deal of warmth for the work of the ReEntry Center.

I have just reread my first contribution to the ReEntry Review which was the Center's newsletter way back in 1984. I had been on board two weeks when asked for my contribution, and I can still remember writing the words "I find myself in the pleasurable midst of a staff which is intelligent, warm and enthusiastic. The enthusiasm is contagious and I am immediately caught up in all of the excitement and learning which is constant here. I spend afternoons with women who are working toward future employment and happiness. Their determination and support of each other is tremendous." It is so good to know that these words are still applicable today. This sense of warmth permeates each and every day and helps keep my spirit intact. The staff and the participants who enter our doorway are the people who have helped me to know what is important in life and to move through some interesting personal and professional stages of my life.

When I wrote about what I brought to the Center I provided the following: "In the past I have been a dorm director, taught Career Education to youth in Alabama, served as a NOW president, and taught Learning Skills at Georgetown College. I now know from those experiences that I CAN evacuate 500 women in four

minutes from what was thought to be a raging fire, drive a four-speed library truck (without upsetting it), walk into an auditorium of 300 jeering teenagers to teach Career Education without fainting, pass out ERA literature without getting a pie in the face and tell a 250-pound football player that he needs to learn how to study. The triumphs and disappointments are numerous, but each has proven to be a valuable learning experience." I had also lived through a divorce, moved several times, found a new friend--my dog, Cadet, and given notice to my boss in Georgetown on a Monday and was here working on the following Monday. Talk about quick transitions!!! What I find truly amazing about this is the fact that "time" certainly changes one's thoughts and feelings. Six years later I bring a very different perspective to my work.

As in 1984, I now provide what I have obtained from the experiences of working with approximately 1500 women during the past six years. I CAN offer the encouragement, support and a touch of motivation to begin life journeys. I CAN read, write, listen and speak to each of you about what is really important in your hearts. I CAN be aware that the journey is yours--and, only by making your own decisions, will you ever reach your dreams and desires. I CAN adamantly say that I have great feelings of admiration, love and caring for those of you who have dared to search within yourselves and find a person who was worth all of the effort.

I now know from being a teacher at the ReEntry Center, a student at the University of Cincinnati and from sharing with

staff and participants that learning cannot be done without emotion. One must experience a feeling of investment from the heart in the learning process, and realize that life will never be the same after learning takes place. The learning taking place at the ReEntry Center entails a great deal of heart--AND THAT IS WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE! Knowledge, combined with the examination of life experiences, is what learning is all about. As Socrates said, "an unexamined life is not worth living." The ReEntry Center is invested in helping people move forward by gaining knowledge and insight into their lives. I have learned from many participants that courage and perseverance are the most necessary skills for making life transitions; and, it is with a great deal of thankfulness that I have shared with the women who have taken the risk to reach for their full potential.

In closing, I wish each of you a life that offers endless opportunity. I thank you with all of my heart for sharing with me your thoughts, feelings, visions and quests. It has made my own journey a reality.

Angela Taylor, Associate Director - ReEntry Center 1990